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# GRAYS HARBOR COUNTY

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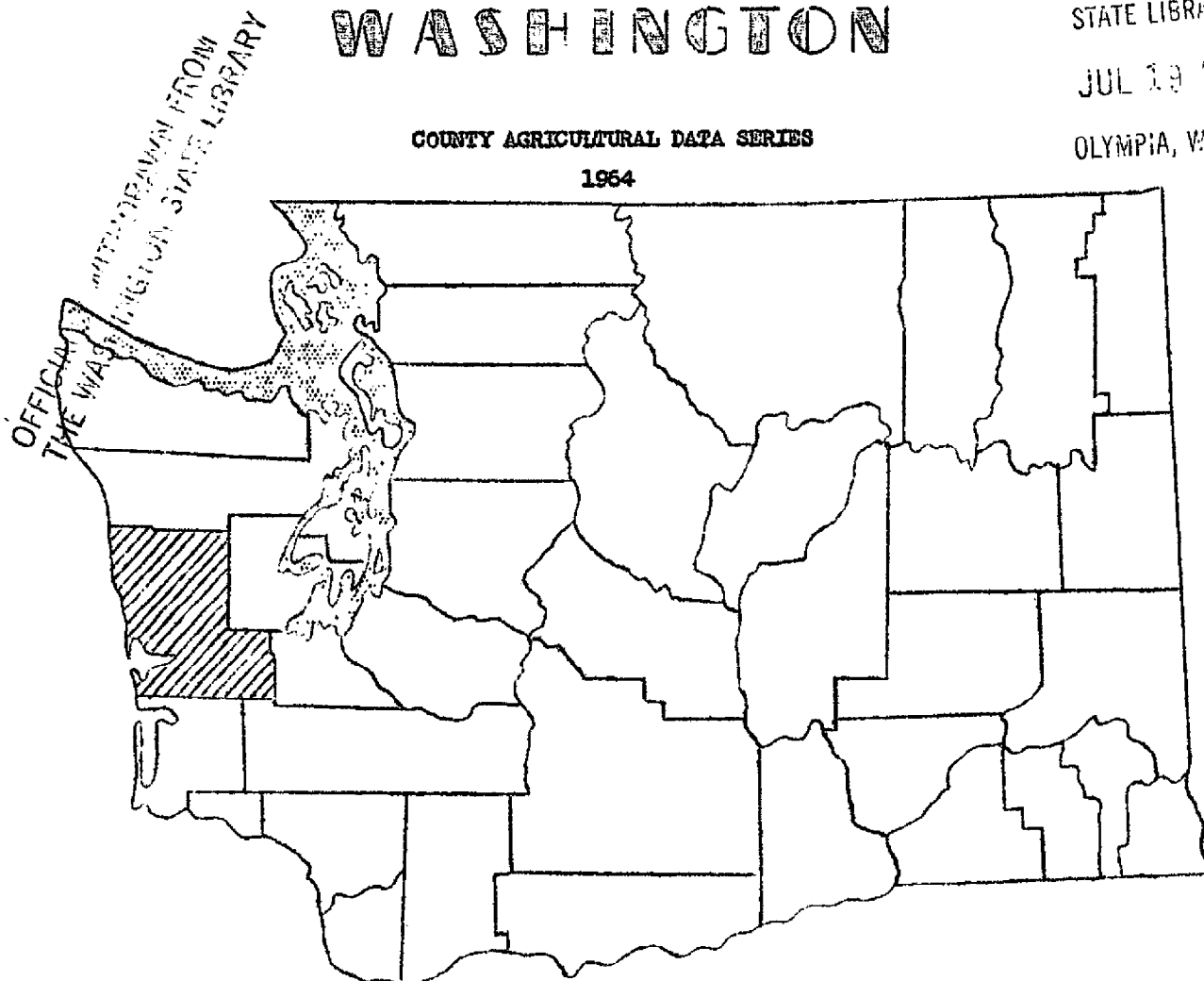
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# AGRICULTURE

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COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DATA SERIES  
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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Joseph D. Dwyer, Director

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Statistical Reporting Service  
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WASHINGTON CROP AND LIVESTOCK REPORTING SERVICE  
348 Federal Office Building  
Seattle, Washington 98104

## FOREWORD

This bulletin on Grays Harbor County is one of a second edition series devoted to presenting the history and present nature of agriculture in each of the thirty-nine counties of the State of Washington. The original series was initiated in 1956 by the Washington State Department of Agriculture. State funds were matched by moneys from the United States Department of Agriculture under the Research and Marketing Act of 1946.

County agricultural data books are intended to serve a variety of needs. Continually changing conditions in a dynamic state such as Washington require constant planning by groups and individuals, especially in the field of marketing agricultural products. Knowledge of land resources, population and agricultural-economic trends in a local area such as Grays Harbor County is of great value. This book will be useful for reference in public and private instruction by social studies teachers. It has been devised also to inform adults interested in knowing more about their immediate area.

Selected geographic facts, agricultural history, population trends and statistical data are included to give an overall appreciation of Grays Harbor County. Enumerations of the United States Censuses of Population and Agriculture are summarized to give a perspective of development since the establishment of Grays Harbor County in 1854. Facts on topography, soil, climate and forest which influence farming are integrated from surveys and reports of government agencies. Estimates of leading crops by years since 1939 by the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service provide a measure of the trend in the agriculture of the county farm industry.

Acknowledgment is accorded the professional work of several persons. Immediate direction was under Emery C. Wilcox, Agricultural Statistician in Charge, Field Operations Division, Statistical Reporting Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Research involved in up-dating and revising the original information and the preparation of the manuscript of the second edition of the Grays Harbor County bulletin were performed by George K. Saito, Research Analyst, Washington State Department of Agriculture. Editing of the first draft of the present bulletin was done by Emery C. Wilcox. Agricultural Statisticians of the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service gave valuable assistance. Margaret B. Quiroga, Washington State Department of Agriculture, typed all of the textual and tabular material and prepared the graphs. The bulletins were reproduced and assembled by members of the clerical staff of the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service.

Olympia, Washington  
December 1, 1964

J. D. Dwyer, Director  
Washington State Department of Agriculture

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## PART I

## HISTORY OF GRAYS HARBOR COUNTY

Introduction

Grays Harbor County is situated in southwest Washington with a coastal frontage on the Pacific Ocean of about 50 miles. The county reaches inland 30 to 50 miles. The area is characterized by river bottomlands, tidewater plains, bays and forested uplands. Most of Grays Harbor's farming activity is found in the southern part of the county which lies within an agricultural region known as the Puget Sound Lowland Prairies. This region extends well beyond Grays Harbor's political boundaries but within the county, it encompasses the bottomlands, river terraces and open prairies of the Chehalis River Valley and lowland areas north of Grays Harbor. The county supports an expanding agricultural economy based largely on dairying, livestock, farm forestry, poultry and cranberries.

Grays Harbor's area of 1,921 square miles (approximately 1,229,440 acres) makes it fourteenth in areal size among the 39 Washington counties. According to the 1959 Census of Agriculture, slightly over 8 percent of the county land area was in farms and about 1.5 percent, or 18,632 acres, was in harvested croplands. Forest-covered, hilly and mountainous topography extends over most of the county, thus confining the expansion of croplands. Although occupying a secondary position among the county's various economic activities, agriculture has continued to increase in production and gain in relative importance.

History 1/

The first white men to explore the area now occupied by Grays Harbor County were Americans led by Robert Gray. The date was May 7, 1792 when Captain Gray and his crew aboard the ship, Columbia Rediviva, entered the harbor which now bears the leader's name. These men traded for otter furs and salmon with the Chehalis, Quinault and Chinook Indians. At times, some of these Indians were hostile and Gray's journals record skirmishes while in the area. The Indians had no agriculture and lived by fishing, whaling, hunting and wild berry and root gathering. For over 50 years after its discovery by Gray, there was very little activity at Grays Harbor except trading for furs and smoked fish by seafaring Americans and British.

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The gold rush in California and development of San Francisco as a port resulted in the beginning of a coastwise trade in logs, lumber, oysters and fish. Impeded by forests and poor navigation on the rivers, interior white settlers from south Puget Sound and the prairies around Centralia and Chehalis began settling on the Grays Harbor and lower Chehalis River area in the 1850's. At first, dense forests discouraged pioneer farming west of Oakville.

Permanent American settlement in the Chehalis Valley and on Grays Harbor also was delayed by disputed jurisdiction of the lands north of the Columbia River between the United States and Great Britain. In the Treaty of 1846, British territorial claims by the Hudson Bay Company were relinquished to the United States. The present area of Grays Harbor County became part of Oregon Territory and open to American settlers.

The Donation Land Law of 1850 passed by Congress to encourage settlement in present Oregon and Washington was an early stimulus for white settlement in the Chehalis Valley. The law provided a grant of 640 acres to a married man or 320 to a single man upon his occupancy of the tract. Under this law, D. E. Byles and family settled at Elma in 1853.

Indian resistance to white occupation discouraged settlement during the early 1850's, particularly in the lower Chehalis Valley and on the coast at Grays Harbor. This situation was eased by a pact in July 1855 between the United States and the Coast Indians of the Quinault, Chehalis, Shoalwater and Makah tribes which provided for reservations. Out of this pact, the Taholah (Hoquiam) Indian Agency was established and in later years the Quinault, Shoalwater and Chehalis Reservations were formed. One of the first important white settlements on the coast was the U. S. Army's Fort Chehalis built in 1860 on Point Chehalis at the entrance to Grays Harbor. The fort was activated to provide protection to early settlers in the area against warlike, seafaring Indians.

In the late 1850's, a small stream of Americans interested in lumbering, fish packing and whaling began arriving by way of the Chehalis River or by sea. Glenn Peterson settled at Westport in 1858. American whalers built a station at Bay City for rendering whale oil. In 1859, Sam Benn, the area's most prominent pioneer, acquired 600 acres at the present site of Aberdeen and brought in the first cattle. A pioneer named Weatherwax brought in the first team of horses.

1/ Material used in this historical and descriptive summary has been obtained from the following authors and publications:

- (1) Belle Reeves, Secretary of State, The Counties of Washington (Grays Harbor County). (Prepared by Richard M. Perry, Supervisor, Bureau of Statistics) Olympia, Washington, 1943.
- (2) Washington, A Guide to the Evergreen State, American Guide Series. Compiled by the Federal Writers Project, WPA. Published by the Washington State Historical Society. Binforde & Mort, Portland, Oregon, 1941, pp. 561-567.
- (3) Short, Yvonne Theresa. Historical Study of Grays Harbor County.
- (4) Welsh, William D. Brief Historical Sketch of Grays Harbor, Washington.
- (5) Pacific Monthly, Vol. 17, Feb. 1907. "Grays Harbor, The Largest Lumber Shipping Port in the World."
- (6) Lucile McDonald. Seattle Times Sunday Magazine, Jan. 29, 1956. "Gray's Discovery of the Columbia River."

In 1858, Samuel Redman settled at Montesano. Salted salmon, log piling and raw furs were important items of trade among the early settlers. An important early industry was a cannery built by George Hume at Aberdeen. There was some trade of agricultural products between those operating ocean vessels and local residents. As logging with oxen and horses increased, a hay and grain market emerged locally.

Settlement by 1854 had reached a point where the pioneers of the Chehalis Valley and Grays Harbor could successfully petition the Washington Territorial Legislature for county status. On April 14, 1854 the area was detached from Thurston County and named Chehalis. For many years, local citizens were not in accord with the location of the seat of government, the boundaries and the name of the county. In 1915, a legislative act renamed the county Grays Harbor in honor of Captain Robert Gray. Montesano was established as the county seat in 1860. The county had a population of 285 at the time the first census of the area was taken in 1860.

In the 1880's, Grays Harbor County began to boom. An expanding lumbering industry and a rush of homesteaders seeking timber and farmland under the Homestead Act of 1862 brought many settlers. Coastwise trade to California in piling, sawlogs and lumber was rapidly expanded. Good access to the interior of the state was opened with the completion of a branch line from Centralia to the harbor by the Northern Pacific Railway. Roads in the Chehalis Valley and navigation improvements on the Chehalis River reduced isolation from the Puget Sound area. The ports of Hoquiam and Aberdeen were improved. Grays Harbor became nearly equal to Puget Sound in volume and value of Pacific Coast lumber trade by the turn of the century. By 1890, the population of Grays Harbor County reached 9,250.

Homesteading and industrial employment opportunities attracted skilled settlers from the East and from many European countries. As good farmland in the cut-over areas of the Chehalis River basin became available, part of the growing industrial population bought small tracts and developed dairy, livestock and poultry farms on a part-time basis. Improved strains of dairy cattle were introduced to the Chehalis Valley.

With rapid industrialization, the county population grew to 35,599 by 1910. During this period, Grays Harbor was termed the "world's largest lumber shipping port". The county had 17 lumber mills employing about 3,300 men with an annual payroll of over \$2,000,000. Expansion continued during the 1920's when there were 32 mills. In 1930, the county population reached the record high of nearly 60,000.

The lumber boom had a significant impact on local agriculture. As the population grew, the county became a food deficit area as local producers of milk, cream, butter, poultry, eggs, slaughter livestock and vegetables could not keep up with the immediate market demands. Census of Agriculture data of 1920 show that there were over 1,000 farms in the county and land in farms covered nearly 90,000 acres.

Prior to 1920, it was discovered that the sandy bogs near the ocean were well-suited for cranberry culture. This discovery was made at Long Beach in Pacific County by a grower from France named Anthony Chabot. From his plantings in 1883, cranberries were introduced into the Grayland district of southwestern Grays Harbor County. Ed Benn was an early grower at Grayland. Others, notably the Finnish settlers in the area, expanded this industry further. Today, Grays Harbor and Pacific are the two major counties in Washington with commercial acres of cranberries.

After the depression years of the 1930's and 1940's, Grays Harbor County agriculture went to a relatively stable basis. Specialization in dairying and cranberry growing has continued. The county economy has become more diversified with wood product manufacturing of plywood, finished lumber, paper and pulp and an expanded beach resort and tourist industry. Farm forestry has recently been recognized as a new opportunity. Crops and livestock have been selected, improved and/or modified to be better adapted to the area's climate. Marketing organizations and facilities have been established and improved. Part-time farming continues as a basis part of the economy which is mainly industrial. In 1959, Grays Harbor County ranked twenty-ninth among the counties of Washington in value of farm products sold which amounted to \$3,563,844 during that year.

The development and refinement of agriculture in Grays Harbor County has been guided by several private and public agencies. Prominent among these are the local Grays Harbor Dairymen's Association, the Dairy Herd Improvement Association, the National Cranberry Association and the Washington Farm Forestry Association. Important public agencies have been the Washington State University Experiment Station and its Cranberry-Blueberry Experiment Station at Long Beach and the County Extension Service with agents located at Montesano. Engineers and soil scientists of the Soil Conservation Service have helped solve problems of soil and land management peculiar to this coastal area.